

## **ARIZONA CHARTER SCHOOLS QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

**Q    What is the purpose of charter schools?**

- A    The purpose of this new breed of public schools is to provide a unique setting for learning that will improve pupil achievement and provide additional public school choices for students and parents.

In general, charter schools are meant to encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods; create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for a learning program at the school site; provide parents and students with expanded educational opportunities within the public school system without the constraints of traditional bureaucratic rules and structure; and provide schools a way to shift from a rule-based to a performance-based system of accountability. In essence, charter schools allow for increased flexibility in exchange for increased accountability.

**Q    Who grants the charter?**

- A    In the Arizona legislation, there are three types of boards which may sponsor a charter school. Organizers of a charter school may apply for sponsorship to any of the following:

- the State Board of Education
- the State Board for Charter Schools
- any local school district governing board

**Q    How many charters can be approved?**

- A    There is no restriction on the number of charters any of these 3 entities may sponsor, however since July 1, 2000, school districts may only sponsor charter schools located within the geographic boundaries of the district.

**Q    What is the length of a charter?**

- A    The initial charter is granted for fifteen (15) years. The sponsor must review the charter every five (5) years.

**Q    Who is eligible to apply to establish a charter school?**

- A    Anyone. The law states that the sponsor of a charter school may contract with any “public body, private person or private organization.”

**Q    Can an existing private school become a charter school?**

- A    Yes, as long as it agrees to abide by the laws which govern charter schools. The school must have an admission policy which is non-selective and non-discriminatory. Private schools that wish to become charter schools cannot charge tuition.

**Q Can a religious organization establish a charter school?**

A The law does not prohibit religious organizations from organizing a charter school. However, the school charter must ensure that the charter school is “nonsectarian in its programs, admission policies, and employment practices and all other operations.”

**Q Can an existing public school submit a proposal to become a charter school?**

A Yes. An existing public school may submit a charter proposal to any of the sponsoring bodies, including its own district.

**Q To what accounting requirements are charter schools subject?**

A Charter schools are subject to the same financial requirements as a school district including the new Uniform System of Financial Records for Charter Schools, procurement rules and audit requirements. However, exceptions to these rules may be requested by the party applying for a charter and granted by the charter’s sponsor.

**Q Do teachers who teach in charter schools need to be certified?**

A No. There is nothing in the law that requires teachers in charter schools to be certified. However, federal regulations require that special-education programs be supervised by a certified teacher.

**Q What grade configurations might a charter school contain?**

A A charter school must provide a comprehensive education for at least one grade from among grades K-12. This is the only restriction.

**Q Does a charter school have to teach a core curriculum?**

A Yes. A charter school must provide a comprehensive program of education aligned to the Arizona Academic Standards although that program may emphasize a particular learning philosophy, style, or subject area.

**Q Must charter schools issue “school report cards?”**

A Yes. Arizona law requiring public schools to issue these annual reports includes charter schools.

**Q Must a new charter hold a public meeting prior to opening?**

A Yes, Arizona’s law requires if a charter school operator is not already subject to a public meeting or hearing by the municipality in which the charter school is located, the operator of a charter school shall conduct a public meeting at least thirty days before the charter school operator opens a site or sites for the charter school. The charter school operator shall post notices of the public meeting in at least three different locations that are within three hundred feet of the proposed charter school site.

**Q    What information is required by law in a charter school application?**

**A**    Arizona's charter school law suggests possible information that may be included in a charter school application including:

1.    A mission statement
2.    A detailed business plan
3.    A description of the charter school's organizational structure and governing body
4.    A financial plan for the first three years of operation
5.    A description of the charter school's hiring policy
6.    The name of the charter school's applicant and requested sponsor.
7.    A description of the charter school's facilities and location
8.    A description of the grade(s) being served
9.    Criteria designed to measure the success of the charter

There are additional requirements for a charter application. The law also requires the following information be included in any charter:

1.    A statement of compliance with all laws pertaining to health, safety, civil rights and insurance
2.    A statement guaranteeing that it is nonsectarian in its programs, admission policies, employment practices and all other operations
3.    Plans for a comprehensive program of instruction for all grade levels to be served
4.    A method for measuring pupil progress including AIMS, achievement tests and an annual report card
5.    A statement that the charter school is subject to the same financial and electronic data submission as a district, including the Uniform System of Financial Records for Charter Schools (USFRCS), procurement rules and audit requirements (Charter Applicants may request exceptions to USFRCS and procurement from their sponsor.)
6.    A statement promising compliance with all federal and state laws relating to the education of children with disabilities in the same manner as a school district
7.    That it provides for a governing body for the charter school that is responsible for the policy decision of the charter school
8.    That it provides a minimum of 177 days of instruction before June 30 of each fiscal year unless approved to offer an alternative schedule by its sponsor. (Statutes require an additional day per school year until the 05-06 school year which will require 180 days.)
9.    A description of the governing body for the charter school and a description of personnel policies, personnel qualifications, method of school governance, and the role of the sponsor
10.   Assurance that the charter school will keep on file for public viewing the resumes of all current and former employees who provided instruction to pupils at the school